2022-2023



### ANNUAL REPORT







#### **CONTENTS**

The Centre	1
Letter from the Director	2-3
Executive Committee & IAR Fellows	4
CISAR Highlights	5-6
Remembering Dr. John Wood	7
Spotlight	8
CISAR Events 22-23	9-20
CISAR Co-sponsored Events 22-23	21-23





#### THE CENTRE

The Centre for India and South Asia Research (CISAR) promotes interdisciplinary research related to South Asia, disseminating knowledge through seminars, lectures, and conferences. The Centre brings together faculty, research associates, graduate and undergraduate students, and the public with an interest in South Asia.

It also seeks to create and promote institutional **UBC** connections between and other institutions in South Asia and beyond, and between UBC and South Asian communities in British Columbia. CISAR is part of the Institute of Asian Research within UBC's School of Public Policy and Global Affairs.









The C. K. Choi Building, home to CISAR



Audience at the screening of A Narmada Diary, September'22



CISAR IAR Fellows, Program Assistant Malavika Kannan, and Inside the scenic C. K. Choi Building Director Priti Narayan in a meeting





### LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

After a few years of pandemicnecessitated low levels of activity, it was a busy year for CISAR. With renewed vigour, we collaborated with various departments and community organizations to host a variety of events that disseminated research and events on South Asia. There was much to reflect on this year, from the floods in Pakistan and state responses to the pandemic in India, and other ongoing structural issues of perpetual Indigenous importance including dispossession and discrimination. This report provides an overview of our activities this year.

Our brought together events audiences from across the university community and beyond. They spanned diverse formats. including film screenings, talks, discussions, book events and an academic symposium. advantage of Taking advancements made in technological capabilities during the pandemic, many of our events were accessible, either hybrid in format or entirely online, allowing

speakers and audience members to participate from all over the world. Multiple events were part undergraduate syllabi and witnessed high student attendance. In what was a memorable get together, several faculty students. and staff commemorated Mother Languages Day by sharing poetry, music and thoughts in and about their own languages to a very diverse group consisting South Asians and others.



. . . many of our events were accessible, either hybrid in format or entirely online, allowing speakers and audience members to participate from all over the world.

In addition to various collaborations with departments and centres across campus, we had meaningful opportunities to work with a host of community organizations including Chetna Association of Canada,



Ambedkarite International Coordination Society, Poetic Justice Foundation, Equality Labs, and Sher Vancouver. Institute of Asian Research Fellows associated with CISAR were able to be part of multiple events as moderators and organizers.

It was thanks to the initiatives of the executive committee and the work done by past directors and friends of CISAR that our community-engaged activities were possible this year. Program Assistant of CISAR Malavika Kannan handled all our logistical and communication needs, ensuring high production values and incredible food at all on-campus events. Thanks to Rudaba Tabassum who assisted to compile our comprehensive annual reports. Thanks are also owed to Yoko Nagao, Rhita Bounaaja, Kai Ostwald and Tim Cheek for all the support and encouragement they gave to our endeavors.

With an expanded executive committee this coming year, we look forward to continue hosting important conversations on campus this year.

We invite you to subscribe to our social media and newsletters, and join us at the various engagements planned.

On a personal note: as someone relatively new to UBC and Vancouver, undertaking CISAR activities allowed me to find community on campus. It has brought me in touch with several faculty, students and progressives in BC with whom I have the opportunity to learn, collaborate and break naan. I hope that CISAR continues to provide this type of community for others thinking about South Asia.



Priti Narayan
CISAR DIRECTOR



#### **EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**



Dr. Kavita Philip



Dr. M.V. Ramana



Dr. Sujatha Ramdorai



Dr. Sara Shneiderman



Dr. Sunera Thobani



Dr. Veena Sriram

#### **IAR FELLOWS 2022-2023**

Amrit Tamang

Amrita V. Nair

Devesh Arora

Karthik Anand Chinta

Mahashewta Bhattacharya

Mahnan Omar

Mitali Madhusmita

Nehal Gupta

Wellage Chandima Silva

Parboti Roy

Sampada KC

Simran Kaur

Varun Panickar



#### **HIGHLIGHTS:**

### STEPS TOWARDS ADDRESSING CASTE-BASED DISCRIMINATION

This year, CISAR strengthened connections with South Asian community organizations in BC to bring attention to caste-based discrimination. CISAR was one of the co-sponsors of an international conference on Caste in Higher Ed organized by Equality Labs. In collaboration with Equality Labs and the Poetic Justice Foundation, we hosted a talk with activist and author Thenmozhi Soundararajan on her book *The Trauma of Caste: A Dalit Feminist Meditation on Survivorship, Healing, and Abolition.* 

CISAR, Chetna and the Ambedkarite International Coordination Society (AICS) worked together through the year to co-host an academic symposium associated with Dr. Ambedkar Equality Day in April 2023. The goal of the symposium was to provide a forum for thinkers to gather and reflect on the progress made and challenges experienced over the past twenty years since the International Dalit Conference was hosted in Vancouver in May 2003.

In the run-up to the symposium, CISAR had the honour of playing host as Chetna and AICS observed Mahaparinirwan Diwas to pay homage to Dr. BR Ambedkar on his 66th death anniversary in December 2022. On the occasion, CISAR was presented a portrait of Dr. Ambedkar by the family of artist Shital Anmol. A month later, in January 2023, CISAR collaborated with Chetna to host a documentary screening on caste discrimination in higher education institutions in India. We have not come here to die, a documentary by Deepa Dhanraj, covered the circumstances and events surrounding PhD scholar Rohith Vemula's death at the University of Hyderabad in 2016.

All these events related to caste discrimination have been aimed at increasing public awareness of the issue, with the ultimate goal of including caste as a protected category in institutions across BC. We are inspired by similar mobilizations and outcomes in the Toronto District School Board, Carleton University's academic association, the City of Burnaby and several universities in the U.S.



#### **HIGHLIGHTS:**

### COLLABORATIONS WITH COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

An important part of CISAR's mandate is to create institutional linkages between UBC and South Asian communities in British Columbia. Based on the community outreach undertaken by UBC alumnus, scholar and filmmaker Ajay Bhardwaj, CISAR has been attempting to build and strengthen connections with various community organizations in the Greater Vancouver Area.

In addition to the various events on caste co-organized with Chetna Association of Canada, the Ambedkarite International Coordination Society, and the Poetic Justice Foundation, CISAR had the opportunity to collaborate with Sher Vancouver.

Sher Vancouver is a cultural and social service organization for LGBTQ+ South Asians, and their friends and families. CISAR screened *Emergence: Out of the Shadows*, a documentary produced by Sher Vancouver, and invited the cast and crew for discussion with the UBC community.



On the 66th death anniversary of Dr. Ambedkar, family of the late artist Shital Anmol, officially gifted a portrait of Dr. Ambedkar to CISAR on December 6 at a ceremony hosted by Chetna Association of Canada in partnership with the CISAR and Ambedkarite International Coordination Society (AICS), photo collected from Drishti Magazine



### REMEMBERING DR. JOHN WOOD

Dr. John Wood, the founding director of the Centre for India and South Asian Research, mentor, colleague, and friend of the UBC community, passed away on November 23, 2022. CISAR remembers him fondly for his extensive research on India and South Asia, and integral role in the centre's formation and growth.

Dr. Wood received his BA from the University of Toronto, Victoria College. During his undergraduate studies, he worked with railroad workers in North Manitoba and Newfoundland. Later, he taught English in India through Canadian University **Students** Overseas. He travelled to India between 1962 and 1964, a precursor to his life's work on Indian and South Asian culture and politics. John worked extensively on furthering ties in higher education between India and Canada through the Shastri Indo-Canadian institute, as a two-time residential director (1973-75, 1989-90), president (1994-96), and vice president (2004-05). He was also an executive member of the Canadian Asian Studies Council between 1992 and 2004, in which he served as president during his last two years.



Portrait: Dr. John Wood

He was the founding director of CISAR, under the Institute of Asian Research at UBC, at which he became an honorary professor in 2008. primary focus throughout his 35 year professorial career was the politics of India and South Asia, on which he published numerous works on topics such federalism. nationalism. as reservations. separatism, human Indo-Canadian rights, and the community.

We offer our condolences to his family, friends, colleagues and students.



#### **SPOTLIGHT:**

#### **YOUNUS MUSHTAQ AHMED**

### NEHRU HUMANITARIAN AWARD WINNER 2022

Younus is a UBC Public Scholar and candidate Ph.D. in Medical Anthropology. His research focuses on development narratives in health interventions. His doctoral project explores the erasure of caste intervention India's sanitation program, Swachh Bharat Abhiyan or Clean India Mission, and the impact this denial continues to have on urban marginalized communities. Younus is currently Chennai conducting ethnographic fieldwork for doctoral project. During his fieldwork and as part of his public scholarship,



A broken public toilet for women in Chennai, 2023. Photo by Younus Mushtaq Ahmed



Portrait: Younus Mushtaq Ahmed

Younus will use the funds from the Nehru Humanitarian Award to produce а short documentary highlighting the everyday challenges slum residents face when accessing public toilets in their locales. Younus holds a bachelor's degree in Sociology from Loyola College, India, as well as a master's degree in Sociology and Anthropology from International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM). As an IAR Fellow at CISAR in 2021-22, Younus published his work in East Asia Forum. Presently, Younus is a Liu Scholar at the Liu Institute for Global Issues in the School of Public Policy and Global Affairs (SPPGA).









# A NARMADA DIARY AND DISCUSSION WITH FILMMAKER ANAND PATWARDHAN

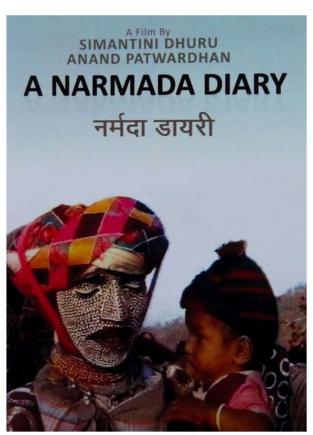
#### **SEPTEMBER 30 2022 | 5 PM PST**

P.A. WOODWARD INSTRUCTIONAL RESOURCES CENTRE (IRC) -3

On Truth and Reconciliation Day in Canada, CISAR screened A Narmada Diary, a 1995 film by Simantini Dhuru and Anand Patwardhan. The Sardar Sarovar mammoth Dam. development project River on Narmada in Western India has drowned many thousand hectares of fertile land, and displaced at least a hundred thousand Adivasis, - the Indigenous people of the region. The documentary introduces the Narmada Bachao Andolan (the Save Narmada Movement) which spearheaded the agitation against the dam and emerged into a dynamic struggle.



Filmmaker Anand Patwardhan at the screening event



Poster of the film *A Narmada Diary* 

The event featured Anand Patwardhan, one of India's most honored documentary filmmakers who has made films on a range of social issues, including immigrant farm workers in British Columbia.



Following the screening, he was joined by UBC graduate students, Jessica Koski and Parboti Roy, who shared thoughts on the injustices faced by Indigenous people in their respective contexts, Anishinaabe territory on Turtle Island and the Chittagong Hill Tracts in Bangladesh, respectively, and deliberate on what resistance and solidarity can look like.

The event was well-attended by over 50 people from UBC and beyond.



Organizers, attendees and friends with filmmaker Anand Patwardhan after the screening event



Graduate students Jessica Koski and Parboti Roy (CISAR IAR Fellow)



Screengrab from the film A Narmada Diary



Audience at the film screening event



Filmmaker Ajay Bhardwaj introducing Anand Patwardhan



Screengrab from the film A Narmada Diary



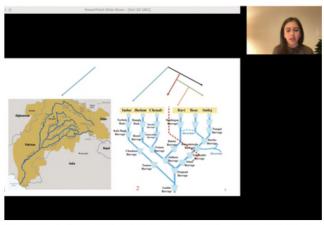
#### **FLOODS IN PAKISTAN:**

#### **CONSIDERING COLONIALISM AND CLIMATE CHANGE**

#### **OCTOBER 20 2022 | 6 PM PST**

The monsoons of 2022 left over a third of Pakistan's provinces underwater. While the spring saw scorching temperatures of over 50°C, rains that began in mid-June left at least half a million displaced, killed over 1400 people, and destroyed more than a million homes and thousands of kilometers of roads.

While being immensely vulnerable to climate change and disaster events, Pakistan contributes less than 1% to global greenhouse gas emissions. This discussion examined the floods in Pakistan through the lens of historical legacies of colonialism, and asked what reparations should look like.



Screengrab from Maira Hayat's presentation during the event



Poster from the event's promotions

The event featured Maira Hayat, Assistant Professor in the University of Notre Dame and Member of the Advanced Institute  $\circ f$ Studies. Princeton University, and Wagas Butt, Assistant Professor in the Department of Anthropology at University of Toronto - Scarborough. This online event was attended by over 50 people from UBC and beyond, including Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Thanks to our collaborators, Centre for Climate Justice and Peter Wall Institute for Advanced Studies who made this discussion possible.



#### **MADE IN BANGLADESH:**

#### FEATURE FILM SCREENING AND LIVE Q&A WITH FILMMAKER RUBAIYAT HOSSAIN

#### **NOVEMBER 01 2022 | 5 PM PST**

**UBC GEOGRAPHY BUILDING** 

CISAR and the Department of Geography Made screened in Bangladesh, a feature film which shows the journey of a group of garment factory workers in Dhaka, Bangladesh, who advocate for their rights after one of them is killed in a fire.

Acclaimed feminist filmmaker writer Rubaiyat Hossain joined a large audience over Zoom for a Q and A session with the large audience. In addition to members of the public, from students two Geography undergrad classes engaged with the film as part of their coursework on globalization and postcolonial theory.

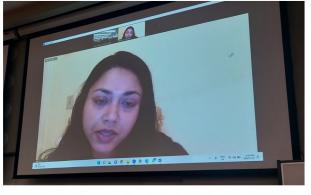


Audience watching the film at the screening event

The discussion was an opportunity for students to understand the centrality of garment factories to Bangladesh's financial economy and the independence of its women while also highlighting the grave environmental and societal conditions that enable this work.



Poster from the film Made in Bangladesh



Screengrab of filmmaker Rubaiyat Hossain answering questions from the audience



### CITIZENSHIP AND BORDERS IN SOUTH ASIA:

### A VISUAL CONTEMPLATION WITH VISUAL ANTHROPOLOGIST NATASHA RAHEJA

#### **NOVEMBER 16 2022 | 5 PM PST**

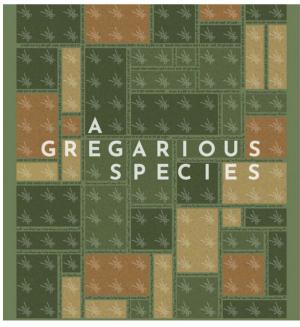
UBC BIOLOGICAL SCIENCES BUILDING,
ROOM 2200

With the joint efforts of CISAR and the Centre for Migration Studies, documentary filmmaker and legal and visual anthropologist Natasha Raheja led a screening of short film excerpts and presented a talk on borders, mobility, and belonging, of humans, non-human animals and objects. A rapt audience watched *A Gregarious Species* (2021), a found-footage, experimental video raises questions about the selective porosity of borders amidst environmental crisis, farmer insecurity, and nationalism in South Asia.

They also got a first look of *Kitne Passports?* (How many Passports?), a film in production about four cross-caste, Pakistani Hindu migrant families in western India, as they shift between minority and majority status, navigating uncertain futures.



Portrait: Natasha Raheja



Title card of A Gregarious Species

#### FIGHTING FOR LIFE?

#### **ENVIRONMENTAL LAW IN INDIA**

#### **DECEMBER 08 2022 | 6 PM PST**

In an online event by CISAR, conducted in collaboration with Centre for Law & the Environment, Rahul Choudhary, Livelihood Awardee Right 2021, presented a talk on environmental lawyer in India. Choudhary is an Environmental Lawyer based in New Delhi, India and a trustee of Legal Initiative for Forest & Environment (LIFE), an organization that works for environmental democracy. LIFE assists communities across India that are affected by various industrial and developmental projects in understanding environmental issues and their rights.

Choudhary helps communities, individuals and CSOs access courts and other forums in environmental issues. He spoke about environmental law in India and the National Green Tribunal, discussing his experiences with fighting various environmental cases.



Portrait: Rahul Choudhary











### DOCUMENTARY SCREENING:

#### **EMERGENCE - OUT OF THE SHADOWS**

#### **JANUARY 26 2023 | 5 PM PST**

**Q** UBC BUCHANAN A103

In the feature documentary *Emergence:* Out of the Shadows, the disparate journeys of Kayden, Jag and Amar converge around a shared sense of compassion and healing as they navigate their sexuality in and with their conservative South Asian families.



Screengrab from *Emergence: Out of the Shadows* 



From left: Founder of Sher Vancouver Alex Sangha, cast members Jag Nagra and Jaspal Kaur Sangha, director Vinay Giridhar, and moderator of the discussion CISAR IAR Fellow Wellage Chandima Silva



Poster of *Emergence*: Out of the Shadows

Confronted with tradition and taboo, some parents choose love and support for their children, offering courage and inspiration to individuals and communities with struggling acceptance. CISAR in collaboration with Sher Vancouver screened the and hosted a documentary, discussion with members of the cast and crew after. It was a deeply moving experience for everyone in the room.



### CELEBRATING MOTHER LANGUAGES

#### MARCH 14 2023 | 6 PM PST

• C.K. CHOI BUILDING, ROOM 120

UNESCO proclaimed International Mother Language Day (IMLD) in 1999 to celebrate and protect the diverse languages of the world. It is also a tribute to the sacrifices of many in the movement for the preservation of the Bengali language in Bangladesh.

Every year IMLD is celebrated at CISAR with multilingual presentations, performances, and multicultural festivities, representing diverse languages from around the world. This year, students, faculty, and other members of the UBC community got together in an intimate gathering to share poetry, music, and food.



The gathering celebrating International Mother Language Day



#### **BIRTH MAPPING:**

### EXPLORING STORIES OF LABOUR AND BIRTH THROUGH UNIQUE ARTS BASED RESEARCH

#### **FEBRUARY 15 2023 | 5 PM PST**

**Q** UBC GEOGRAPHY BUILDING, ROOM 201

Kaveri Mayra is a midwifery, nursing and global health researcher exploring experiences and determinants of obstetric violence in India through an arts-based method called 'birth mapping'. In her talk, Mayra shared narratives of labor and birth in India through birth maps, an adaptation of body mapping and delved into the details of how this participatory work was conducted.





Kaveri Mayra delivering her talk at the event

#### THE TRAUMA OF CASTE:

### A DALIT FEMINIST MEDITATION ON SURVIVORSHIP, HEALING, AND ABOLITION

#### MARCH 2 2023 | 5 PM PST

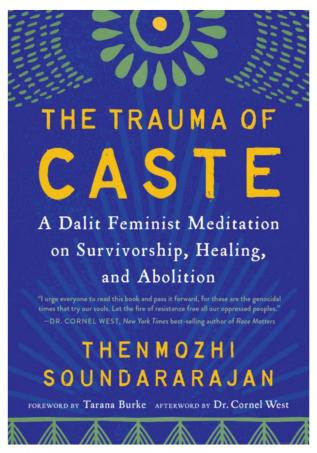
CISAR, in partnership with the UBC Institute of Asian Research at the UBC School of Public Policy and Global Affairs, Equality Labs, the Social Justice Institute at UBC, and UBC Public Humanities hosted an impactful online book talk featuring renowned activist Thenmozhi Soundararajan and Anita Lal, co-founder of the Poetic Justice Foundation.

Thenmozhi Soundararajan, Executive Director of Equality Labs, presented insights from her debut book, which critically analyzes caste-based oppression and its daily impact on 1.9 billion people. The discussion delved into the Dalit Feminist perspective, exploring paths toward healing and abolition of caste discrimination.

Anita Lal shared her experiences as a fourth-generation settler in British Columbia and her work with the Poetic Justice Foundation. Lal's contributions to social justice emphasize inclusive, intersectional approaches to

addressing biases, inequalities, and oppressive systems, including casteism and racism.

The event was enriched by thoughtful dialogue and audience engagement by recognizing and combating castediscrimination on a societal level both locally and globally.



Cover of the book *The Trauma of Caste* 



# DR. AMBEDKAR INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM FOR EMANCIPATION AND EQUALITY DAY

#### **APRIL 21-26 2023**

Ambedkarite International Coordination Society of Canada, Chetna Association of Canada and UBC CISAR together hosted the Dr. Ambedkar International Symposium on Emancipation (ACE) 2023 on campus. The specific areas of focus for the Dr. Ambedkar Symposium on Emancipation (2023) were

- Access, opportunities, and challenges for social and economic development of youth, both in India and abroad.
- Reflecting and building on strategies developed through prior conferences and research for taking the caravan forward to advance political, economic, and social interests of marginalized communities.
- Evaluating the role of Buddhism for emancipation and restrategizing in context of the emerging realities.

The symposium brought together local and global leaders and thinkers to discuss the impact of caste on social, economic, and political life, as well as the challenges faced by people belonging to Dalit communities in personal and public settings, such as academia and employment. It was attended by over 200 people in person and online, in what turned out to be an important and optimistic gathering for anti-caste thinkers and community members.



Poster for the event's promotions



The symposium attempted to shed light on the realities of caste-based discrimination and to propose strategies and actions to create more inclusive societies. One of the topics of the discussion at the symposium was to review caste in academic settings and reassess equity policies, reflecting the recent recognition in many major universities of caste as a protected category. Students from UBC-V, UBC-O, and University of Calgary shared their experiences of caste-based discrimination, and the advocacy efforts they are involved in winning caste-based protections in their respective institutions. This session may have been the first official recorded discussion of caste in Canadian institutions, one that we hope will enable institutional change across institutions here.









Moments captured during the Symposium



#### **CISAR CO-SPONSORED EVENTS**

#### **DECOLONIZING CLIMATE COLONIALITY:** A PUBLIC TALK WITH FARHANA SULTANA

#### **SEPTEMBER 27 2022 | 1 PM PST**

THE xwθəθiqətəm (PLACE OF MANY TREES), LIU INSTITUTE FOR GLOBAL ISSUES

The Peter Wall Institute for Advanced Studies, CISAR and the Centre for Climate Justice co-hosted a powerful lecture by Farhana Sultana, Professor of Geography and the Environment at Syracuse University. Sultana explored the lingering effects of colonialism on climate change, highlighting imperial legacies exacerbate environmental degradation and climate-induced disasters.

Throughout the conversation, emphasized the need to decolonize climate justice, addressed the intertwined histories of colonialism, capitalism, and geopolitics. Her call for transformative global governance and solutions resonated deeply with the audience. The talk further was enriched by Sultana's interdisciplinary expertise and extensive research on subject matter and provided valuable insights into the complexities of climate justice.

Peter Wall Institute for Advanced Studies and the Centre for Climate Justice Present

#### **Decolonizing Climate Coloniality** a public talk by

Dr. Farhana Sultana



Poster from the event's promotions



#### **CISAR CO-SPONSORED EVENTS**

#### **CASTE IN HIGHER EDUCATION CONFERENCE**

OCTOBER 14-15 2022 | 10 AM PST

In partnership with Equality Labs and the National Academic Coalition for Caste Equity (NACCE), CISAR successfully hosted the first national conference on caste in higher education featuring leading student activists, academics, community organizers, union members, higher education staff and administrators, and civil rights leaders, all committed to advancing caste equity in colleges and universities. The conference focused on increasing understanding of caste issues and offering practical solutions to support caste-oppressed students, staff, and faculty. Participants engaged in dynamic discussions, workshops, and panels, emphasizing the necessity of fostering inclusive educational environments and implementing comprehensive caste protections. CISAR is honored to have played a role in this pioneering conference, reaffirming our commitment to addressing caste-based discrimination and promoting equity in higher education.

## STATE-LEVEL RESPONSES TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN INDIA: LEARNINGS FROM MAHARASHTRA AND TAMIL NADU OCTOBER 27 2022 | 9 AM PST

UBC Health and CISAR co-sponsored an interactive dialogue session as part of the Health After 2020 program. The session focused on state-level responses to COVID-19, especially in localities across Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra, with researchers Veena Sriram, Peter Berman, Girija Vaidyanathan, and Sarthak Gaurav sharing their findings. The discussion highlighted the role of institutions, governance, and politics in pandemic responses, offering insights for strengthening public health systems globally. Participants engaged in an engaging discussion on scopes to improve decision-making for future health emergencies, drawing valuable lessons from India's experience during the global pandemic.



#### **CISAR CO-SPONSORED EVENTS**

#### FILM SCREENING: WE HAVE NOT COME HERE TO DIE

#### JANUARY 17 2023 | 5:30 PM PST

**ROOM 1700, SFU HARBOUR CENTRE** 

CISAR collaborated with Chetna Association of Canada and Institute for the Humanities at SFU to host a screening of the documentary "We Have Not Come Here To Die" by Deepa Dhanraj at the SFU Harbour Centre. Deepa Dhanraj, an award-winning filmmaker and activist, has been involved in the women's movement since 1980, focusing on political participation, health, and education.

Tuesday, January 17, 2023

© 5:30 pm.

Simon Fraser University,
Room 1700 (Labatt Hall)

555 West Hastings, Vancouver, BC

Chetna Association of Canada
in partnership with
Institute for the Humanities at SFU

Center for India and South Asia Research at UBC

Poster from the event's promotions

Her work emphasizes the importance of solidarity movements and the fight for the rights of marginalized communities. The documentary sheds light on the pervasive issues of identity-based persecution and the neglectful treatment of minority groups in India, particularly within academic institutions.

The event also included a discussion on the film's themes, encouraging a deeper understanding of the systemic challenges faced by Dalit people and fostering dialogue on social justice and equality across the audience members.

The screening was well-received, with participants engaging in meaningful conversations about the impact of caste discrimination and the importance of activism in promoting societal change.





cisar.iar@ubc.ca



sppga.ubc.ca/institutes-centres/



facebook.com/CISARatUBC



@ubcCISAR



@ubccisar



#### THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

#### Centre for India and South Asia Research

School of Public Policy and Global Affairs Institute of Asian Research